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**THE LINGUISTIC IMAGE OF HUNGARIAN AND SERBIAN  
CIVILIZATION**

**On the basis of *The Philosophy of Wine* by Béla Hamvas and its Serbian  
translation**

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# THE LINGUISTIC IMAGE OF HUNGARIAN AND SERBIAN CIVILIZATION

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### Topic, aims

The main topic of this paper is the reconstruction and comparison of the linguistic images of civilization in Hungarian and Serbian language on the basis of the notions denoted by the key words of Béla Hamvas's *The Philosophy of Wine*. Béla Hamvas had great influence on the Serbs, particularly during the 1990's. Following the change of the political system in the Eastern Europe people found themselves having nothing to go by. Hamvas offered a perspective of a new kind of life to the Serbs, fatigued by the wartime psychosis and general hopelessness. In *The Philosophy of Wine* he speaks up against atheism as a bad religion and believes in God hidden in wine, ham, precious stones and women instead. The key word of the work is wine as God's hieratic mask, as well as a cure, which can help atheists regain the completeness and health of their souls.

One of the interesting questions this paper deals with is whether it is possible to translate a philosophical essay such as *The Philosophy of Wine* so that none of the meanings and connotations of the words used is lost. In each language words contain different meanings, atmosphere and associations. In other words, each language contains the image its speakers have about the world.

Hungarian and Serbian language differ very much, both genetically and typologically. Their vocabularies, however, as well as their phraseology are very much alike, due to the parallel development and history of the Hungarians and the Serbs. The linguistic image of the world is mostly reflected in the lexis and in the phraseology, and in this respect the two nations do not seem to differ so much at all.

### Methods

Although some may consider a work of literature unsuitable for this kind of research due to the fact that it usually presents a specific world view, we consider any literary work a text which contains the linguistic model of the world,

culture and civilization. Our analysis is based on the text which contains lexical units connected to the notion of civilization. Our aim is to place these units in the system of the linguistic images of civilization in the Hungarian and Serbian language.

In order to reconstruct the linguistic image of the two civilizations our research examined vocabulary, phraseology, collocations and connotations, idiomatic expressions, sayings and proverbs in which these key words are found. We used the material of different mono and bilingual dictionaries, as well as etymological and dialectical dictionaries of both languages. We also think that metaphors, which pervade our everyday language, have an important role in the conceptualization of reality.

### **The results**

Both Hungarian and Serbian language have rich vocabulary connected to wine. Wordbuilding in Serbian is characterized by diminutives (*vince*, *vinko*, *vinašce*, *vinogradić*), while in Hungarian there are more metaphorical expressions which characterize wine itself (*gondúz*, *búkergető*, *búfelejtő*). It seems interesting that *grožde*, which is the name of the fruit wine is made of, does not occur in the Serbian vocabulary in connection to the cultivation and production of wine, and occurs only in few cases in Hungarian (*szőlő*, *szőlős*, *szőlőskert*). Both languages though contain a great number of words and expressions connected to wine cultivation and production, which means that the culture of wine-making as well as its consumption was/is highly developed in these two civilizations.

The basic features of wine are its colour, taste and origin. In Hungarian we distinguish white from red wine (*fehér*, *vörös/piros bor*), whereas in Serbian the colour is rather black than red (*crno vino*). In the western parts of the Serbian-speaking territory people use *cijelo vino* (literally it means: whole wine) expression to refer to the wine not diluted by water. *Kršteno vino* (baptized wine) is mixed with water or mineral water. This expression in Hungarian (*keresztelt bor*) is of Slavic origin.

Examining the phraseology of wine, we concluded that according to both Hungarian and Serbian language, wine has different influence on the person who

drinks it: 1) it shows the person's true character (*a bor kimondatja az emberrel az igazat; vino je duše ogledalo*) 2) it changes the person in a good or a bad sense (*még a vénembert is táncha viszi a bor; vino i starca zaigra*; 3) it deprives the person of common sense (*az okos embert is eltántorítja a bor; vino i mudroga pobudali*). In terms of semantic relations, both (izbrisano) Hungarian and Serbian language witness an opposition between wine and water (*vagy bor, vagy víz!; ni voda ni vino*).

The drink has an important role in the ritual of making a toast. Wine is mentioned in the ritual texts performed in Slavic traditional culture at all important events. It pronounces good wishes, but it also has a role in predicting the next year's weather (*Evo me s vinom! Ako bude vince vinovito bit će ljeto kišovito, ako bude vinokvas bit će nama bolji glas*). *Vinožito*, meaning 'rainbow', is another expression connected to the weather prediction – according to the colours of the rainbow the next year's crop can be predicted. In several Hungarian and Serbian sayings wine goes along with wheat, which means that it is as important as wheat from which bread is made (*bor, búza, szalonna égnek fő adománya*). There is a vast number of toasts in the humorous verses performed by 'vőfély' at traditional Hungarian wedding parties as well. The 'vőfély' verses emphasize that wine helps people see the world through pink glasses (*Igyunk együtt, drága jó barátok, lássuk rózsaszínben ezt a cudar világot!*).

Wine is a positive notion Hamvas builds up his philosophical system on in his *The Philosophy of Wine*. WINE IS GOD and WINE IS CURE metaphors are based on the ability of wine to cure from atheism.

When writing about the male and female, fair or dark-haired, soprano, alto, tenor and bass-voiced wines, Hamvas creates WINE IS A PERSON metaphor in his work. These metaphors are living metaphors in both Hungarian and Serbian, which is the reason why the speakers of these two languages do not come across any problems in understanding the text.

The etymology of the words meaning 'God' differs in Hungarian and Serbian, but the notions behind the words are very much alike. Speakers of both languages imagine God as a supreme force, the power of which determines people's lives in every way. Both languages also have rich vocabulary connected to God.

The notion of God is one of the abstract notions which are rather difficult to visualize since they do not have physical appearance in objective reality. This is the reason why the speakers of these languages use metaphors to conceptualize it. In the linguistic image of 'God' these languages share the concept of God as a person. One of the ways personification is achieved is attributing God people's body parts (*megfogta az Isten lábát; az Isten háta mögött; prst božji; bogu iza leđa* etc.). This image of God originates from the Old Testament, in which God created man in his own image. Therefore, God is also a creator (*az Isten is jó kedvében teremtett valakit; az Isten is egymásnak teremtette őket; kako je koga bog stvorio*). Apart from the body parts, in Hungarian God possesses a country, house, servant, mill, whip and a zoo, the latter being rather ironic: *Nagy az Isten állatkertje (sok bolond lakik benne)*. This saying has a negative connotation, as well as the Serbian phraseologism *u ovom božjem oboru*.

According to Hungarian and Serbian linguistic image, God lives up in the heaven (*ha van Isten az égben; letagadná az Istent is az égből; nebeski car; nebeska sila; kad je bog po zemlji hodao (hodio); skidati (sve) bogove (svece) s neba* etc.) and is also omnipotent: *Isten látja lelkem; Isten a tanúm; ha Isten enged; ha Isten is úgy akarja; bog sveti zna; bog bi ga razumeo; kako bog zapoveda; što bog da* etc. When people found themselves in difficult situations and thought only God could help them, the following phraseologisms came into being: *biti/nalaziti se u božjoj ruci/ božjim rukama; na milost božju; Istennél a kegyelem, mindnyájan (az) Isten kezében vagyunk* etc.

Death in Hungarian and Serbian language means encounter with God. In Hungarian and Serbian there is a large number of phraseologisms containing the concept of God summoning people to meet him (*az Isten hazaszólt valakit, az Isten magához szólít; ići /otići/ poći Bogu na istinu/račun* etc.). Another frequent concept in both Serbian and Hungarian expressions is that at the moment they die, people give their souls back to God, from whom they originally got it: *dati/ predati Bogu dušu; preporučiti svoju dušu Bogu; lelkét Istennek ajánlja*.

In a great number of everyday situations people use expressions such as greetings, farewells, good wishes, expressing their feelings and so on, which in both Hungarian and Serbian language very often contain the word 'God'.

In *The Philosophy of Wine* an atheist is the opposite of a healthy man, that

is, he is not a whole person without religion. This dualism originates from the two meanings of the Hungarian *egészség* (health), which at the same time means 'whole' and 'healthy'. In Serbian *zdravlje* there is no notion of 'whole', but can be found in the verb *isceliti*, which means 'cure somebody' or 'make something whole again'. Therefore, the word for 'health' in both languages contains the concept of completeness. Hamvas uses a great number of adjectives to describe the atheist (*sánta, vak, nyomorék, fogyatékos, korcs, béna, süket, félkegyelmű, féleszü, idióta, lelki fogyatékos*), which all refer to some kind of physical or psychological deficiency in specific or abstract terms. There is also similarity between the two languages in the expression meaning 'developmental disorder' (*fejlődésben visszamaradt; zaostali u razvoju*) due to the fact that both Hungarian and Serbian conceptualize development as 'movement forward'. Hungarian *visszamaradt* and Serbian *zaostali* both have negative meaning, since they have the connotation 'backwards'. The Serbian language does not have equivalents for Hungarian adjectives *féleszü, félkegyelmű* in the sense that the Hungarian *fél* means 'half, less than usual, not whole'.

In the course of this research we have also come to the conclusion that both languages conceptualize the notion of 'health' as the lack of illness. The adjective meaning 'healthy' can refer to physical and psychological health of human and other living beings, to objects or abstract notions. That 'healthy' contains the notion of 'completeness' seems to be confirmed by the fact that in Serbian this same word is also used to define an object such as, for example, 'intact barrels' (*zdrave bačve*). The Hungarian does not use this word for objects, but the notion of 'whole' as the basis of the word 'healthy' (*egészséges*) occurs in the phraseologism *nincs ki egészen*, and refers to mental illness. In conclusion, 'health' in Hungarian and Serbian is conceptualized as a whole, and if a part is missing from it then we can speak about illness.

The etymology of the Serbian word *zdrav* reveals the connection between the notions of 'health' and 'tree'. It consists of two elements: *\*srъ* (good) and *\*-dorъ* (tree, wood) and its literal meaning is 'made of good wood'. This opinion is illustrated by a phraseologism *zdrav kao dren/drenovina* emphasizing the strength and health of the tree, as well as the habit of wishing good health by saying *da kucnem u drvo* (knock on wood) followed by the action of knocking on

a wooden object, usually a piece of furniture.

Health has a distinguished position in the system of values in Slavic traditional culture and this is proved by the fact that most of the traditional greetings contain the stem *zdrav* (*zdravo, u zdravlje, pozdrav*, verbs *pozdravljati, nazdravljati*, in Hungarian *kedves egészségére, váljék egészségére* etc.) If somebody makes a toast in Hungarian and drinks to somebody's health they say *valakinek az egészségére iszik*, whereas in Serbian they *piti u nečije zdravlje*. It seems therefore, that health is considered the most important value both for the speakers of Hungarian and Serbian language.

The word 'soul' in Hungarian (*lélek*) and Serbian (*duša*) refers to the immaterial part of the human being, the moral, emotional, or intellectual nature of a person, courage and conscience. Other meanings of this word (in Hungarian for example *a toll lelke* 'soul of the pen' as well as *lélek* referring to an inner part of a stringed instrument; in Serbian *duša* can refer to a barrel of a firearm, and in both languages 'soul' refers to a person) are of metaphorical or metonymical character. It is evident that 'soul' is closely connected to life itself, especially if we take into consideration that the original meaning of the word in Hungarian was 'breath', which is also a possible meaning of the Serbian equivalent. Eventhough the most frequent equivalent for 'soul' in the Serbian translation of *The Philosophy of Wine* is *duša*, in a few cases *duh* (spirit) is the adequate one, since in Serbian *duh* refers more to the intellect and *duša* seems to be more of emotional character.

A common feature of Hungarian and Serbian is that both languages position soul inside of the body, although no precise position is stated: *tartja a lelket valakiben; kirázza a lelket valakiből; zapekla se duša u nekome*. In both languages death is described as a soul abandoning the body: *kileheli a lelkét; ispustiti (izdahnuti) dušu*. In Serbian a great number of phraseologisms describe where the soul leaves the body: *nositi dušu u nosu; dršće komu duša na jeziku; došla komu duša pod grlo*.

As an entity in motion, 'soul' occurs in the Hungarian phraseologism (*már csak) hálni jár a lélek valakibe*, which is based on an ancient concept according to which 'soul' is life itself, as well as in *visszatér belé a lélek*. 'Soul' therefore moves either from the outside world towards the body, or from the body to the outside world.

Being an abstract notion expressed by numerous metaphors, 'soul' as a target domain has a great number of source domains, which means it can be approached in many different ways. 'Soul' as an object or container is often present in these two languages. The interior of the container is where the emotions are kept: *a lelke mélyén; a lelkébe lát; gledati u dušu, dirnuti u dušu* etc. 'Soul' as an object also has an inside and an outside part, which are both influenced in different ways: *belenyúlt a lelkébe; örökre lelkébe vésődik; lelkébe lop*. It is basically a closed object which sometimes opens: *megnyílik a lelke; otvoriť dušu*.

In Hungarian and Serbian 'soul' is also conceptualized as an object under a burden, which can be some kind of pressure or responsibility: *valakinek a lelkén fekszik valami; nyomja a lelkét valakinek; imati na duši; kamen leži kome na duši; nositi teško breme na duši*. Finally, the languages conceptualize 'soul' as an object which should be given back to the one who it came from – God: *visszaadja a lelkét a teremtőnek; predati bogu dušu*. The metaphors mentioned seem to prove that the speakers of Hungarian and Serbian language share the linguistic image of the word 'soul'.

Eventhough Hamvas emphasizes the role of our mouth in sensing the world, in our everyday lives we actually depend on our eyes. Besides experiencing the reality we ought to comprehend the world which surrounds us. According to Hungarian and Serbian language (as well as many other languages), understanding is seeing. This metaphor is illustrated by a great number of examples: *világos magyarázat; átlátszó hazugság; belátta, hogy hibás döntést hozott; kinyílt a szeme; ne vidim u čemu je smisao; vidim da nije pogodan trenutak; jasan odgovor; očigledni razlozi* etc. It is impossible to see without light, which attributes the light – darkness opposition an important role in the metaphorical system. The first element of this opposition is knowledge, while the second refers to the lack of it.

In the examples given, the verb *lát* (see) is the synonym of 'understand'. In the Serbian translation of *The Philosophy of Wine* the translator once uses *primetiti* verb instead of the original word *videti*, or an alternative associating to it (*uočiti*). As far as the light – darkness opposition in the text and its translation is concerned, we mostly encountered pairs in which the darkness was supposed to stand for the lack of knowledge, understanding (*sötét szekta – tamna sekta, vak hit*



– *slepa vera*). There are a few equivalents for the Hungarian *sötét* (dark) in the Serbian translation: *taman*, *mračan* and *mrk*. Wine illuminates the soul if we take into consideration that the Hungarian verb *illuminál* refers both to street lighting and being drunk (*illuminált állapotban van*). Therefore, this verb has two meanings, but this has not been made clear by the translation. Having analysed the words *felvilágosít*, *szemfényvesztés*, *látszó*, *látszat* (enlighten, trickery, seeming, appearance) and compared them with their Serbian translation we concluded that although the translation does not always reflect the original precisely, the understanding of seeing metaphor is present in both languages.

Apart from some differences, Hungarian and Serbian language conceptualize the world in similar ways, which is probably due to their parallel development and constant contacts. The two languages have a similar linguistic image of the man and of life as well, both being important elements of the linguistic image of the civilization, too. The notions of 'man' and 'life' are also frequent target domains. Both languages conceptualize time as a line, which begins in the past and moves towards the future. The man's life is set somewhere along this one-dimensional line (*rövid,/hosszú élet; kratak/dug život*). The man is a passenger in the metaphor which suggests that life is a journey (*életút; találkoznak az útjaik; elérkezik útja legvégéhez; izvesti koga na pravi put; biti na dobrom/pravom putu; ići ugaženom stazom*). Hungarian and Serbian seemingly differ in conceptualizing the age, such as in expressions *magas kor* and *duboka starost*. However, it is not the direction, but the distance that determines these expressions.

Thinking and thoughts, different theories and discussions are all abstract notions, so we use metaphors to comprehend them. On the basis of the metaphors we encountered in *The Philosophy of Wine*, we have concluded that Hungarian and Serbian have similar concepts of people, conceptualized as plants, buildings or containers. Our thoughts can be objects, theory a building, discussion a war.

Finally, based on the elements examined we may say that the linguistic images of civilization in Hungarian and Serbian language are very much alike. Therefore, the common civilizational vocabulary in the two languages makes the translation easier and enhances the communication between the two languages.

**Publications connected with the subject of the Theses:**

Pojam *duše* na osnovu kognitivnog modela sveta u srpskom jeziku. In: *Балканистичен форум '08. 1-3*. Blagoevgrad (under preparation)

Vino kao kulturološki pojam u srpskom i mađarskom jeziku. In: *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Dissertationes Slavicae. Sectio Linguistica XXVIII*. Szeged (under preparation)

The Linguistic Image of 'Health' in Serbian Language. In: *Езков свят, том 2*. Blagoevgrad, 2008. (under preparation)